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국제학석사학위논문

**The City of Churches:**  
**A Study on the Development of Wenzhou**  
**Christianity and its Link to Economy, Politics,**  
**and Globalization**

온주 기독교 연구:  
경제, 정치, 세계화를 중심으로

2015년 2월

서울대학교 국제대학원  
국제학과 국제지역학전공  
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**The City of Churches:  
A Study on the Development of Wenzhou  
Christianity and its Link to Economy,  
Politics, and Globalization**

A thesis presented

By

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To

Graduate Program in International Area Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master

In the Subject of International Studies

**Graduate School of International Studies**

**Seoul National University**

**Seoul, Republic of Korea**

**February 2015**

# **The City of Churches:**

## **A Study on the Development of Wenzhou Christianity and its Link to Economy, Politics, and Globalization**

온주 기독교 연구: 경제, 정치, 세계화를 중심으로

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이 논문을 국제학 석사학위논문으로 제출함

2015년 2월

서울대학교 국제대학원

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장민애의 석사학위논문을 인준함

2015년 2월

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## **Abstract**

# **The City of Churches:**

## **A Study on the Development of Wenzhou Christianity and its Link to Economy, Politics, and Globalization**

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In the era of a post-mao market transition, China made a remarkable development in its economy and became the world's second largest economic super power with the fastest growing rate. Despite the socialist state's intention to limit its opening only on economy, the liberalization of the market has led to the opening of other sectors and has eased the Maoist state control over various social arenas. Among the many social changes, one of the most astonishing is the growth of Protestant churches, particularly those of unregistered house churches.

The recent phenomena of economic growth, rising Protestantism, and the fragmentation of TSPM churches and house churches all exist in one area called Wenzhou. Especially, house churches in Wenzhou were considered as exceptional examples with having physically large church buildings and presentations of their faith within the public square and workplace. All evidences point that the unregistered Wenzhou house

churches are not “underground” at all but rather “on-ground churches”. This article investigates this distinctiveness of house churches in Wenzhou through the lens of the linkage between this religion and the local economy, politics and its trends and desire towards globalization.

To study the relation between the Wenzhou house churches and the local economy, the author focuses on the role of the entrepreneur which is an overlapping intersection that encompasses both arenas. Most house church leaders are successful entrepreneurs and they have consolidated their position both within the religion and society. And also, through understanding the general perception of Wenzhou house church members towards “doing business” and “making money” caused by Wenzhou’s economic development and the entrepreneur Christians, the author differentiates Wenzhou Christianity from that of other areas.

Moreover, through the frame of church-state relations, this paper argues that unlike other areas, Wenzhou’s unregistered house churches enjoyed much liberalized social space by integrating their economic power and social participation with the local government’s politics. In doing so, even though the churches may face sporadic state persecution for their unlawful status, the local government views house churches as a benefit to the local economy and social stability.

Finally, this study discovers that with its distinctiveness in mobility, Wenzhou house churches have large overseas connections with



overseas Wenzhounese and Christian communities from different nations. Wenzhou churches pursue their development by applying the imitation strategy. Consequently, the network overseas not only nurtures the development in Christianity, but also within the local economy and thus became a core factor which Wenzhou house churches obtain their legitimacy.

In hence, the above mentioned distinctiveness are part of natural consequences caused by both Wenzhou's economic growth and the strategic accommodation between the local government and the house churches in Wenzhou. The implications of Wenzhou house church's scope of possible influence remain uncertain, however, there is a possibility that as Wenzhou Study and the Wenzhou model of economic development serves as a microcosm of China's rural industrialization and modernization.

**Keywords:** China, Protestantism, Wenzhou, house church, Wenzhou Economy, local government-religion relations

**Student Number:** 2013-22072

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# **I. Introduction**

## **1. Study Background and Research Questions**

In the era of post-mao market transition, China made a remarkable development in its economy and became the world's second largest economic super power with the fastest rate of growth. Despite the socialist state's intention to limit its opening only on economic matters, the liberalization of the market has led to the opening-up of other sectors and has eased the Maoist state's control over various social arenas.

Among the many social changes, perhaps the most astonishing has been the growth of Protestant churches. The number of Protestant Christians is growing so rapidly and steadily that some even expect it could have more churchgoers than any other countries by 2030 (Aikman 2003; Lambert 1999; Bays 2003; Dunch 2001). However, although religious freedom has expanded in China since the country began opening to the outside world in 1979, because the government still imposes strong opposition toward any kind of social gathering, it is still extremely limited and the Protestant church exists in fragmented form. Two major groups within the division exists, one called the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches and then the unregistered illegal house churches. The limitation of freedom of religion mainly rose from the issue of government repression on "house churches

(jiating jiaohui 家庭教會) which are described as autonomous, independent, unofficial and underground” (Koesel 2013:583).

This phenomena of economic growth, rising Protestantism, and the fragmentation of TSPM churches and house churches all exist in one area called Wenzhou. Under the same influence of economic reform, Wenzhou, a city located in Zhejiang province shows the development of Christianity<sup>1</sup> as well as much economic progress. With the rapid growth of many small and medium-sized family owned manufacturing enterprises, Wenzhou went through an evolution from an impoverished rural town to a dynamic regional center of global capitalism and emerged as a world outsourcing hub.

However, what caught the eyes of the West is rather a relatively long history of Christian influence and a large population of Christians (Yang 2004; Bays 2003; Li et al. 1999). House churches in Wenzhou especially were considered as exceptional examples with having physically large church buildings and presentations of their faith into the public square and into the workplace (Cao 2007, 2008,2010,2013; Aikman 2003). All evidences point that the unregistered Wenzhou house churches are not “underground” at all but rather “on-ground” churches.

Corresponding to the aforementioned Wenzhou Christianity this paper examines following questions. What makes Wenzhou house churches so exceptional and distinctive from churches in other areas? How has the

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<sup>1</sup> Christianity in this paper refers to Protestantism in particular.

economy of Wenzhou been applied to this religious arena? It also examines the popular discourse of church-state relations by understanding the existing fragmentism between churches in Wenzhou. Next, from the political context, this paper discovers how Wenzhou house churches have managed to enjoy relatively liberalized space in the local society? And what are the roles of Overseas Wenzhounese and Christians in shaping Wenzhou house churches distinctiveness? Finally, what implications and expectations can be drawn from the Wenzhou case for China's and its future Protestantism?

## **2. Previous Studies**

### **2.1 Economy and Religion**

There have been on-going studies and controversies over the relations between religion and economy. This debate first started from Karl Marx, then was fervently developed by Max Weber in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in earnest, and later it came to a state of lull.

Karl Marx who considered to be the first sociologist of religion describes his perception on religion by noting that “[humanity] makes religion; religion does not make [humanity]” (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844; in Tucker 1978: 53). Marx's historical materialism,

which predicted the demise of capitalism at the hands of the proletariat, rested on the assertion that every society's beliefs, politics, and relationships of every other kind were superficial to its mode of production.

Among all of Max Weber's work, his hypothesis covering Protestant ethics in particular has dominated most of the debate on the same matter and attracted the attention of scholars and researchers for the majority of a century. Weber's (1905[1903]) main analysis in *The Protestant Ethic* viewed religiosity as an independent variable that could influence economic outcomes. According to Weber, the Protestant ethic, a mode of behavior whereby ascetic ways of life were motivated by Protestant theological ideas, had changed during the previous century into the 'spirit' of capitalism, a new lifestyle or ethos, in which hard work or accumulation could only be motivated with the most commonplace ideas about work and accumulation being their own rewards (Peltonen 2008:79). He suggests that religious beliefs affect the economy by fostering traits such as strong work ethic, honesty (and hence trust), thrift, charity, hospitality to strangers and so on. By enhancing these traits, greater religiosity could spur investment and economic growth.

According to Frey (Frey 2001), the Weber Thesis became the target of criticism from economic historians who hold onto three major arguments: (1) Weber is wrong about the facts; modern capitalism might have arisen before Reformed Protestantism or in places where the Reformed influence was much smaller than Weber believed (Fischhoff 1944; Bainton 1952;

Samuelsson 1957); (2) Weber misinterpreted Calvinism or, more narrowly, Puritanism (Tawny 1926; Bainton 1952); (3) Weber might have over stated capitalism's need for the ascetic practices produced by Reformed teachings(Samuelsson 1957).

In 1950s and 60s, further discussion on the Weber Thesis was made with the burgeoning East Asian countries' economy. As Rute introduced "in his various works Inglehart et al. argues that societal values such as thrift or focus on work may lose part of their functionality as societies grow richer and move towards post-materialist living. Once the Western societies obtained a high level of economic security they gradually came to emphasize Post-materialist values, giving higher priority to the quality of life than to economic growth. Inglehart further suggests that in this respect, the rise of Post-materialist values reverses the rise of the Protestant ethic. Today, the functional equivalent of the Protestant Ethic is most vigorous in East Asia and is fading away in Protestant Europe due to technological development and cultural changes becoming global" (Rute 2013).

## **2.2 Discourses on Chinese Christianity**

For China's Christianity, previous studies focus either on the development of China's Christianity or on the church-state relations ..

since the rise of 1980s Western scholars, Media and secular research bodies



began to pay attention on the religious revival of China. During the early 1990s some meaningful academic studies of Chinese Protestantism started to rise. Some studies dealt with describing and understanding the development of this phenomena of church revival in socialist China. Other popular discourses politicize the issue of religious freedom and focus on understanding the rise of Christianity from a political aspects.

According to Bays, Alan and Chan set a benchmark in both an objective descriptive profile and an analysis of the dynamics of the social and political as well as religious dimensions of Protestantism (Bays 2003 :489). Bays also gave an analysis of recent trends, current statuses and developments of Christianity in contemporary China. He argues that Protestantism seems rooted in Chinese society with indigenized forms, with some aspects strongly reflecting its affinity to traditional cultural patterns and others appealing to modernity (Bays 2003:502).

Madsen also agreed on the indigenization of Chinese Christianity. Madsen also agreed on the indigenization of Chinese Christianity. Both Bay and Madsen point that it is undeniable that Chinese Protestantism was influenced by foreign churches and missionaries (Madsen 2010; Bays 2003) and “much in common with world-wide trends” (Bays 2003:502), but the imported ideas are not critical to the growth of Chinese Protestantism, because it controls and “establishe(s) its own momentum of development on the basis of its own resources” (Bays 2003; Madsen 2010).

From the state-region relations perspective, it has been suggested

that the church state relation can be described as mutual opposition and church as a negative influence or a challenger to the state. In this context, Spiegel argues that via regulations on religion and religious policies, the state tries to put the religious sect under its control (Spiegel 2004). Spiegel asserts that even till this day, China's leaders have still managed to keep religious congregations small, highly localized, and divorced from a meaningful role within a vibrant civil society (Spiegel 2004 : 53). However, he emphasizes and argues that China's leaders may not yet fully comprehend the power of religious belief and there also is a possibility of believer's demand for more space and recognition as a social force (Spiegel 2004: 54).

With the direct usage of words such as “challenge”, “repression” and “persecution”, Kidnopp more aggressively asserts that the church-state relation can be described as suppression-resistance relation. Despite the state's two-way response with repression and an accommodation strategy, it has limited churches, but it has not been fully successful (Kidnopp 2004). Thus, if the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) continues to practice this ineffective tactic, then eventually the Protestant churches will challenge the CCP's ability to govern.

On the other hand studies exist which present the compatibility between Christian adherence and Chinese patriotism and adaptation to socialism as their arguments. The states purposely choose to hold a temporary alliance with religious groups while keeping the long-term goal of promoting socialism, premised on the Marxist belief that religion will fade away in time.

Dunch also shares the idea of Protestant Christianity's "adaptation to socialism" in China after the struggle during the Cultural Revolution and the liberalization of religious restraints in 1978. He says that "[p]ermitting open religious activities was, therefore, initially seen as a pragmatic and temporary concession to a small minority, a concession that could have only relatively minor harmful consequences"(Dunch 2008:155).

Furthermore, Wielander stands on the same line of state's adaptation of Christian values. In her article, She argues that the use of love in the discourse on Harmonious Society has strong Christian roots and the government gives a covert signal to the growing Christian population that their contributions are valuable and valued (Wielander 2011). She says, "this is a very clever way of tacitly recognizing and enlisting the support of potentially critical and growing social group, and has a number of advantages for the government (Wielander 2011:138).

Cao also argues the same idea for government's acceptance and recognition of churches based on the observation of the relations between local government and entrepreneurs. He suggests that Christian entrepreneurs have earned semi-legal space and further the state's acceptance and recognition of their religious practice based on their economic success (Cao 2014). And also "[the] Christianity constitutes a popular domain in which the state and different local forces participate, rather than an autonomous symbolic universe that is inherently anti-state and anti-hegemonic (Cao 2014).

The research in this text is distinct from related works so far in a

couple of aspects. One virtue of this research lies in its ethnographical study on one particular region and the exceptional examples of Christian lives within. Previous studies dealing with the development of Christianity in China only deliberate the macro graphical analysis focusing on the general circumstances of the Chinese Christianity in overall. Unlike the studies with comprehensive approaches to the religion, this work focuses mainly on the Wenzhou region and its Christianity to enlarge and deepen the understanding of Christianity in the local context. Also, another gain of this study is to visualize the state-religion relations which have infiltrated into the daily lives of existing Chinese Christians. To understand aforementioned theoretical church-state relations in a local level, this research attempts to comprehend the practical political arena via the organic structure and the mutual response of both the state and the religion with flexibility. In sum, these distinctions will give a view of the Wenzhou's development in Christianity as a microcosm of the modernization of China's Christianity and its possible influence on the future role and behavior of churches in the frame of church-state relations.

### 3. Research Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative method with an ethnographical study which was conducted in Yueqing<sup>2</sup>, Wenzhou in summer 2012 and 2013, and the combination of 6years of experiences in house churches in other areas such as Shanghai, Neimenggu, Xinjiang, Beijing, and near Dandong are also reflected. The method of conducting informal, semi-structured, and open ended interviews was applied. Along with the interviews, the author's observation of the churches was also an important means to develop this study. The interviews were done initially in Chinese and then translated into English by the author and most of them were first digitally recorded then later went through dictation, literation and translation process.

During the fieldwork, the author mainly participated as a translator from a Korean Church. Mainly, the research was proceeded in two house churches in Yueqing with different sizes and features; One with a luxurious building and large congregation, the other with relatively small sized worship space, a house with a red cross attached on the outside of the building. Most of the interviews presented in the paper are from the church members of the past and the present; total fifteen-ten males and five females, ages from 17 to

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<sup>2</sup> Yueqing is a city administered by Wenzhou. "Leqing(Yueqing) County has at least 100,000 Protestant Christians and in Yongjia County nearly 20% of the population are officially registered as Protestants. (Lambert, T. 2001, "God's grace – In Germany and Guizhou", *Overseas Missionary Fellowship*, February . Web. ( Accessed 17 Dec.2014) ).

64. The respondents have various backgrounds including entrepreneurs, teachers, students, house church leaders, and church members. Due to the protection of the subject's identities, pseudonyms are used to substitute the interviewees' original names.

## **II. Protestantism in China**

### **1. Development of Protestantism in China**

All countries under Communist regimes, past and present, have enacted harsh regulations against religious groups. China which allegedly follows the Marxist way also has regulated religion in a suppressive way. Among various religions existing within China, Christianity was considered as a symbol of Western imperialism and colonialism. Hence, it has gone through more cruel repression since the beginning of Communist regime.

According to Yang, during the sixty years of community rule in china, the regulation of religion has had four distinct periods: (1) from 1949 to 1957, the party-state suppressed various religions and co-opted the five major religions through establishing the “patriotic” religious associations; (2) from 1957 to 1966, the socialist transformation was imposed to the patriotic religious groups and forcefully reduced the number of religious venues; (3) from 1966 to 1979, all religious venues were closed down, and religion was banned; and (4) from 1979 to 2009, limited tolerance of certain religious groups was governed by increasingly restrictive regulations (Yang 2012).

Consequently, popular discourses of western journalists have been the issue of religious freedom in China ever since. Having seen the eradication measures during the Cultural Revolution, many scholars in the

West even pronounced the death of religion in China (Zuo 1991). However, in contrast, empirical studies have suggested this has not been the case; religion had only disappeared from the public scene.

During the Maoist era, Mao viewed Christianity as a political and ideological enemy. It seemed that Christianity had vanished from the social arena of the public eye under the pressure of mass nationalism and militant atheism by suppression. However, during the religious ban, some Christian groups managed to hold religious gatherings in secrecy at home or in the wilderness (Lambert 1999; Aikman 2003; Huang et al 2005). For example, in Wenzhou, some Christians never stopped gathering to worship during the Cultural Revolution; they continued to hold worship services at night in the mountains (Yang 2006, 2011).

As it became apparent that religion could not be wiped out of people's minds and hearts in the near future, the more pragmatic Deng Xiaoping led the Chinese CCP in a change of course. To rally the nation for economic reform and development, CCP authorities conceded to the religious demand, albeit with firm reservations (Yang 2012). Beginning in 1979 with limited allowance for few temples and churches, the regulation of religion was gradually eased. In 1982, the CCP issued Document No. 19," The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Affairs during the Socialist Period of Our Country," which state the limited tolerance to five religions and set the basis for the current religious policy (Yang 2012). Those Five religions are Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. China has since



then experienced a widespread revival of religious faith and practice. Many kinds of religions, including official and unofficial religions, have been reviving and thriving (Tong 2012:11; Lai 2003; Yang 2008).

Alongside with less restrictive market regulations, the religious liberalization has led to a dramatic growth of Christianity in China. Although Christianity has grown at the fastest pace, it is not the largest group among the five officially tolerated faiths (Tong 2012: 11; Bays 2008). The Recent reports by Chinese government estimates the Chinese Christian population as 1.8% of total population, around 23million (Jin and Qiu 2010:190) which is the least of all estimated numbers. A recent report says, “between 2008 to 2012, 2.4 million people are baptized as new members of the church; 5,195 churches and meeting places were newly built or rebuilt; 3 new theological seminaries were established; 1,057 pastors, 482 teachers (second pastors) and 1,443 presbyters and elders ordained or installed; 17.5 million Bibles were published.” (Wenzel-Teuber 2014: 23).

Today, while the CCP government still imposes its regulations against Christianity, public standpoints regarding Christianity have been changed from imperialism view to one of modernization. It used to be realized as a means of spreading Western colonialism or even imperialism itself. However, many Chinese people no longer consider Christianity a foreign religion and a tool for Western imperialistic expansion, but as a prestigious religion that symbolizes modernity and cosmopolitanism (Lim 2013:5; Yang 2005).

Thus, in recent years China has witnessed the rapid growth of religion in general and Christianity in Particular. A great number of young, educated and well-off Chinese, including entrepreneurs, have declared their new faith in the Christian God. Researches has also shown that there are a growing number of Christian companies, ones that declare their active pursuit of combining Biblical principles with business activities, emerging in cities such as Wenzhou and Shanghai (Tong 2012: 73; Chen and Huang 2004).

## **2. The Development of Protestantism in Wenzhou**

Wenzhou is a good example that presents the modernization and upsurge of Christianity with a relatively long history of Christian belief and the large number of Christians. Wenzhou is a harbor city near the south of the Ou river, located in the south-east corner of coastal Zhejinag province (Liu 1992: 294). In traditional times, because of the geographical isolation ---high mountains on three sides and the ocean on the fourth with prevented proper transportation on the ground. The main link between Wenzhou and the rest of China was by sea (Liu 1992; Aikman 2003). Historically, Wenzhou served as the trading center of southeast Zhejiang and northern Fujian and as the main entreport for trade with large northern ports such as Ningbo and Shanghai (Liu 1992:697). For this reason, the Ningbo was forced to open its gate to the west and thus missionaries entered Shanghai and made mission

trips to spread the Gospel along the coastal line. For this reason, Wenzhou area became one of the first Gospel recipients (Cao 2011).

The history of Protestantism goes back to 1867--- comparatively later than that of first missionaries in Beijing 1601, with missionaries being sent to Guangzhou in 1807. The arrival of a one-legged “Scottish peasant” missionary named George Stott alongside with his wife Grace, began the introduction of Christianity to this area. His work was continued by William Edward Soothill, an English Methodist missionary who arrived in China in 1882 (Aikman 2006 ; Chan 2014; Anderlini 2014; Cao 2011).

Unlike the local people’s unwelcoming atmosphere and hostile attitude towards missionaries in the beginning, the number of Christian believers, mainly the youth grew largely. Due to its isolation and negligence from government influence, this growing number of the Wenzhou faithful even endured campaigns of repression by successive governments and anti-foreign movements which stroked up every time the treaties were imposed unequally in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Aikman 2006; Anderlini 2014; Cao 2011).

When Mao’s government came to power in 1949, Wenzhou was ravaged by the same anti-Western campaigns (Aikman 2006:183) and later became “a testing ground for the elimination of all religion, a campaign that reached its crescendo during the bloody and chaotic Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976” (Anderlini 2014). One house church elder testified,

“During the Cultural Revolution, no religion was allowed to have freedom of worship or hold gatherings. All churches had to close and their buildings became warehouses to be used as movie theaters by the government. If illegal religious meetings got caught by the police, the imprisonment would be the least thing we would need to worry about. During that time, Christians in Shanghai stopped doing any kind of worship, but Wenzhou house churches never stopped worshiping God, we rather simply changed their meeting methods. Instead of meeting in a house or a church, we climbed up the hills and mountains of Tianguan and mountain Yandang. We were like the guerillas, secretly continuing to keep our faith.”<sup>3</sup>

This proves that as Spiegel elaborates, during the Cultural Revolution that outlawing religious practice actually intensified Wenzhou Christians faith and their commitment to the religion (Spiegel 2004).

Along with the market opening and less stringent suppression on religion, people started to gather and worship. Even until now, they have been facing another obstacle against obtaining sole religious freedom. Despite the division of officially acknowledged TSPM churches and unregistered illegal house churches, the Wenzhou house churches managed to survive. Rather, “even during that tumultuous decade, when the ‘Three Self’ official church was given the task of wiping out Protestantism, the number of faithful in the underground churches in Wenzhou increased ten-fold” (Anderlini 2014). As Yang argues, in spite of regulation, history recounts myriad religious

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014.

virtuosos who will seek and practice proscribed religious regardless of circumstance, and clandestinely if necessary (Yang 2006 : 98).

In the same vein of the economic and social changes, the Wenzhou Christianity experienced a part of a larger revival of popular religious practices during the post-Mao period. Today, Wenzhou is known as “China’s Jerusalem,” which has at least more than 700,000 Christians, 10% of its population with over 2000 registered churches and 2,000 meeting-points (Chan 2014; Kahn 2014; Lambert 2006).

### **III. The City of Churches: Wenzhou**

#### **1. The Development of Wenzhou Region**

In 1980, with the substantial economic growth fueled by township-and village enterprises (TVEs), the private sector also started to enlarge its space mainly in the coastal areas of Socialist China. Several different Chinese development models in the east coast showed revolutionary economic transition. The Sunan Model, centered in southern Jiangsu Province, stemmed from collectively owned and managed township and village enterprises (Walcott 2007:24) and the Zhujiang Model from Guangdong Province led to enterprises profiting from overseas Chinese foreign direct investments (Walcott 2007; Liu 1992). But most of all, many scholars such as Nolan (1990), Sonobe (2004) Zhang (1989), and Dong (1990) asserted that the heartland of this private sector growth is Zhejiang Province, particularly in Wenzhou City, and name this economic development as the Wenzhou model.

What is peculiar about the development of Wenzhou is the growth of a private sector which can be seen as somewhat contradictory to a socialist ideology. Then, how could this unusual phenomenon of Wenzhou's economy be explained? What allowed Wenzhou to be the first major instance of a private industry? According to Liu(1992), to explain this unusual

phenomenon, a number of views have been offered by both Chinese scholars and local authorities; they can be roughly categorized into five basic arguments: “historical tradition of entrepreneurship, the lack of state investment and the weakening of state control because of Wenzhou’s geographic isolation, the destitution of local economic life, the state reform policy, and the open –mindedness and willingness to take risks found among Wenzhou cadres”(Liu 1992: 294).

### **1.1 Wenzhou: the Regional Background**

Wenzhou is described as a wealthy coastal city located south of Shanghai in Zhejiang province. As an administrative unit, the Wenzhou municipality covers 11,800 square kilometers, including two municipal districts, one inland city, and eight rural counties. Among its 9.1 million residents, 3million reside in the municipal districts and 6.1 million in rural areas. (Liu 1992:294).

Geographically, it is enclosed by mountains on three sides and East China Sea on the fourth. Its traffic routes inland are restricted to several rough roads through mountains, and its contact with other coastal cities relies upon underdeveloped maritime shipment lines (Liu 1992: 300). At the same time, due to its natural environmental conditions and the inconvenient transportation system, the power of the state was not able to effectively impose restrictions upon the area. In hence, the room for private commercial

activity, or to say, capitalism was created by shipbuilding and commercial transportation since the Song Dynasty, in contrast to the agriculture-based economy which dominates most parts of China (Gates 1996; Rankin 1986). This capitalist commodity production has contributed to a distinctive Wenzhou culture and has shaped its commercialism.

Moreover, Wenzhou has its own cultural distinctiveness in its language, the Wenzhou dialect. It is unique and different from other area and it varies even within the area with various dialects. During my first visit to Yueqing, one of the county level cities in Wenzhou, the dialect of a local senior was very different from the standard Chinese or even Shanghai dialect. One of the villagers explained the variety of Wenzhounese dialects, “even the neighboring villages speak all different dialects and those dialects are not similar to each other.”<sup>4</sup>

This linguistic barrier greatly weakened the central state’s ability to serve as an interpretive authority over local culture and society. According to Forster, during the Maoist years the cadres sent from the political center (nanxia ganbu, 南下幹部) to Wenzhou experienced great difficulty in carrying out their political work, owing to their inability to communicate in Wenzhou dialect (Cao 2011:184; Forster 1990:55-56).

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<sup>4</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 15 Aug. 2013.



## **1.2 The Wenzhou Economic Development Model**

20<sup>th</sup> century's Wenzhou is known for its economic development. Its privatized economy experienced rapid growth since 1978 and this drew nationwide attention from many Chinese scholars and authorities. This development mainly characterized by private or family-owned businesses making small products range from cigarette lighters to auto parts. And eventually this new type of economic development has gained gradual recognition from the postsocialist state and has been labeled the “Wenzhou model” or the “Socialist market economy” for the rest of the country (Shi et al. 2002).

The Wenzhou Model's fundamental basis lies in small and medium size private enterprises utilizing local household finance and production skills. Thus, “this development model is supported by group effort based on specialized family enterprises which strategically formed an integrated production unit (Rong 2004). As mentioned earlier, Wenzhou has a long tradition of handicrafts and commerce. Because of this tradition, this city was endowed with substantial human capital in the form of latent mercantile skills when the reform began and, consequently, it had strong potential for growth (Sonobe et al. 2004:546-547). Building on its history and making the most of its local financing base, the city became known for its big market with small commodities (Jeong 2013; Fei 2010). These small commodities represent typical Wenzhou products including inexpensive consumer and household

items such as plastic shoes, purses, kitchenware and glasses and etc., which it markets throughout the surrounding region (Walcott 2007:27).

One of the impressive features of Wenzhounese is its large scale labor mobility. Due to its distinctiveness, Wenzhou mainly achieved recognition for its prosperity linked to a close-knit familial and village based local network. In the same vein, rural-urban information and marketing networks created through migration played a key role. The widespread extent of Wenzhou natives traveling outside their city, while maintaining economic and social links that fueled knowledge and capital transfer, demonstrated a cultural characteristic with financial payoffs (Walcott 2007:27; Shi 2004). With this mobility, it is possible to facilitate smooth flows or products of Wenzhou.

### **1.3 State and Local Policy**

It is considered to be a fait accompli that although Wenzhou's private enterprises are usually listed as collective enterprises in official statistics, but most of them are actually private ones. For this reason, some actually criticized that "Wenzhou's ways was the way of capitalism" and "the commodity economy of Wenzhou was the economic foundation of bourgeois liberalism" (Liu 1992: 703).

According to Liu (Liu 1992), Wenzhou was able to have its way

because of a combination of political factors which were generated by both the state and local government. The support from the national level can be observed when Wenzhou was given comparatively high autonomy due to the consensus among national leaders on impoverished areas. Moreover, during the 80s, when Wenzhou gained its national attention, it also won active support from a group of influential national leaders. For example, Wan Li, the deputy premier and Politburo member, took a personal interest in seeing Wenzhou overcoming poverty, and affirmed the experience of Yishan, a market town in Cangnan County, Wenzhou prefecture. Zao Ziyang and Tian Jiyun (Politburo member and vice premier) also became advocates of Wenzhou by expressing their support for private companies. Later, with the sponsorship of these leaders, Wenzhou was granted the formal status of an experimental zone, and “this allowed Wenzhou to develop its private sector, speed up the reform of state and collective enterprises, and gradually implement reform of the pricing and financial structures in a way that was limited by current central policy” (Parris 1993: 256).

In addition, Wenzhou’s development was strongly supported at the regional level. “A patron-client relationship appeared to have developed between the Shanghai and Wenzhou party establishments” (Liu 1992: 704). During this process, the Liberation Daily, the organ of the Shanghai Party Committee first referred to Wenzhou as a “model”, and later published books advertising and defending the Wenzhou’s achievements (Liu 1992; Lin Bai et al 1987). More importantly, even with possessing diverging opinions on

ideological aspects on Wenzhou's economic model, the local cadres not only encouraged local people to involve in private economy, but also vigorously participated in actual economical activities contributing to commerce and industry. Liu strongly asserts that the local cadres' "open-mindedness" and willingness to shelter the local private interest from state interference is a core factor which accelerated Wenzhou's economy (Liu 1992).

## **2. Wenzhou's Christianity**

Wenzhou is not only known for its economic development but also its enthusiasm for Christianity, referred to by both outside and inside China as "China's Jerusalem," especially drawing western attention to the area. (Kahn 2014; Cao 2010; Aikman 2003; the Economist 2014). According to a famous journal, *the Economist* also calls it China's Jerusalem and further describes Wenzhou as a place which is "ringed by mountains and far from the capital, Beijing, [and] it has long been a haven for a religion that China's Communist leaders view deep unease: Christianity" (the Economist 2014: 24).

Then what makes the Wenzhou house churches so exceptional and distinctive from churches in other areas? Wenzhou's uniqueness conspicuously stands out when it comes to the point of unregistered house church's characteristics.

Although Wenzhou seems to be ahead of the rest of China in the

process of learning and adopting Western capitalism, it retains its small-town character. Administratively, it was recently elevated to a national-level city form a prefecture-level city, but local people still maintain the strong cultural and linguistic uniqueness. And also, Wenzhou resembles a rural town with a poor infrastructure with dilapidated public spaces. “The city mostly looks like other mid-size Chinese cities, with their dusty air grimy factories and slabs of dreary apartment buildings” (Lee 2007).

However, Wenzhou Christianity is somewhat contradictory to the rural characteristic in its composition of church members. China’s Christian population in rural inland area tends to be homogeneously elderly, female, and illiterate (Li et al. 1999; Leung 1999). In contrast, Wenzhou Christianity constitutes a popular participator domain in which a large diversity of people articulates subjectivities and interests. This phenomenon is apparent in urban areas of china. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, prosperous middle-class urban congregations began to emerge in coastal cities like Wenzhou of Zhejiang (Bays 2003: 500-501). More and more members of the middle class in the urban areas have embraced faith while many highly educated professionals or intellectuals have acquired substantial social, cultural, and economic capitals that allow them greater organizational and mobilization capacities in the pursuit of religious aims. Christian converts come from the elite strata of Chinese society consisting of successful business people, university students, and professionals (Lim 2013: 5; Gao 2005; Cao2011). In accordance with the phenomenon, there also has been an emergence of new type of Christian

which is known as ‘boss Christians’ (laoban jidutu 老板基督徒) who are entrepreneurs since the end of the 1980s (Chen and Huang 2004; Cao 2007; Cao 2008). In contrast to the uneducated farmers and elderly city dwellers who have traditionally made up the majority of the Chinese Christian population, these boss Christians are private owners or white-collar workers, mostly middle aged men with wealth (Cao 2010).

Moreover, in China most cities of its size, with about 9 million people, have very few, or rarely have visible Christian buildings. During my research in other areas including Shanghai, Neimenggu and Xinjiang, the unofficial religious gathering needed to be highly secretive, visitors of the house churches had to move from a place to another in small groups with 2 or 3 people each to disguise and pretend the meeting to be nothing but a visit from friends or relatives. Additionally, Wenzhou not only has a large number of Christians with 10-20% of the region’s population, but also boasts numerous physical Christian buildings (Lambert 2006; Cao 2005; Cao 2011).

Hence, in the following section, I will try to discover how it is possible for Wenzhou Christianity to have such urbanized characteristic and liberalized space by examining its linkage with the economy, politics, and globalization.

## 2.1 Economy and religion

### *The Wenzhou model of church*

Along with other forms of religion in China, Christianity has experienced remarkable growth in the past two decades. The number of Protestants has grown from fewer than 3 million in 1949 to perhaps 50million (Madsen 2010: 239) and some estimate a range from 23 to 60million. (Gardam 2011; Melchior 2014). Wenzhou also is known for both its economic development model and its intimate connection to Christianity and the relatively large Christian population. In the last quarter-century the southeast coastal city of Wenzhou has become the largest urban Christian center in China. Popularly known as “China’s Jerusalem” Wenzhou is home to an estimated 700,000-1,000,000 Christians and over 1,200 churches (Mo 1998). According to one elder from a house church,

“ In Yueqing, Wenzhou, although never officially or statistically proved, but there are approximately over a thousand churches practice activities of worship including churches and exist in various forms like the Three-Self church, alongside with unregistered house churches with huge congregations or with a small number of people gathering in a house. In general, relatively large and prosperous churches are located in the downtown Wenzhou area with over 3000 members including migrant workers and their families from other areas in China and local residents and

their families, many of them being children.”<sup>5</sup>

The Reform-era development of Wenzhou Christianity has drawn attention from the outside due to its accompanied Wenzhou’s economic development from an impoverished rural town to a dynamic regional center of global capitalism. The rapid growth of many small and medium-sized family owned manufacturing enterprises, the emergence of the city as a world outsourcing hub, and the rise of an entrepreneurial class in the same region have all contributed to this progress. How does the linkage between economic and religious practices shape the Wenzhou Christianity?

### ***The Church Leaders: The Entrepreneur Christians***

There exists an intersection that overlaps between the arena of economy and religion in Wenzhou which is the player- the entrepreneurs. The new trend of Wenzhou Christian members is the emergence of the boss Christians. Many of the boss Christians are both successful private entrepreneurs and influential Christian leaders (Cao 2008: 64). The Wenzhou leaders are better educated and probably more theologically literate as well as being more engaged in business and society than the rural-based groups (Anderson and Lambert 2006). They enjoyed full reciprocity when the private sector emerged as the new engine of Chinese economic growth under reformist state

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<sup>5</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 22 Sep. 2014.



policy. Like non-Christian Wenzhou bosses, they started their businesses from scratch in the beginning of the reform era as village entrepreneurs. Several interviewees including Chen, one of the elders and a successful CEO in an electronic converter company, also described their company's successful development as a natural result of the state reform policy. The elder Chen<sup>6</sup> said,

“I was born in 1960 and started my business when I was 19, in the year of 1979 when the reform started. My company produces converters. In the beginning, it was a small individual workshop with very few people, mainly my relatives, but now it has more than few hundred people including workers from other areas like Jiangsu and Anhui and has become one of the most advanced high-tech enterprises. In 2001, its annual income culminated in reaching the point of 50 million RMB, and also another branch was established in Shanghai in 2004. Of course I worked very hard and went through times like walking alone in the rainstorm, but I was lucky and blessed to be in a situation that the government started to open up its economy because since then, in accordance with the reform of state economy, my company has experienced rapid growth and development until now.”<sup>7</sup>

Not only the economic growth, but also the Christian revival has been

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<sup>6</sup> Chen is the head elder in a Wenzhou house church and a CEO of a large enterprise and a few companies. He is in charge of preaching sermons mostly to elders and he preaches in local dialects.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 9 Aug. 2014.

intertwined with this regional development so called the Wenzhou model of economic development. Cao (Cao 2010) argues that the Christian entrepreneurs now proudly talk about “the Wenzhou model of church” as a parallel to the renowned Wenzhou model of economic development. As in the case of the Wenzhou model, Christian entrepreneurs played a leadership role in the local church community. According to a house church leader Chen,

“Our church has 1250 households as members, on Sunday we mainly practice two worship services one in the morning and the other in the evening. During the morning worship service about 1200 people participate, and about 1000 members attend the evening service. There are five elders who can be considered as leaders or somewhat similar figures to pastors in South Korea. Their occupation is composed of mostly entrepreneurs, with only one exception, a teacher. Among those elders, 80% or four out of five are entrepreneurs (one of them is now retired and handed his business to his son, three are still actively running their business with a trading company and manufacturing companies). We also have 30 evangelists in our church. They also are leaders who take care of church work and spread the Gospel to villagers; only four are full-time evangelists and the rest are entrepreneurs with small companies or in trade and commerce business.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the boss Christians, rather than pastors, actually have led the governing committees of Wenzhou Christian organizations. Despite their lack of interest in serving the church full-time, boss Christians use their

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014.

economic power to secure teaching and preaching positions in the church. They explicitly promote the production and management of church development in consumerist and entrepreneurial terms (Cao 2008: 64). Following interviews are from two church leaders from the area. They explained:

Wang<sup>9</sup>: “The roles and responsibilities of elders in the church can be categorized in three ways: administration, supervision, and ceremonial conduction. For example, two of those five elders take care of believers and serve the church with administrative work and supervisory duties. One of them is a chairperson of the church (zhuren, 主任). His job can might be compatible to a senior pastor in Korean church who preaches and gives a sermon during the service, and the other is a life senior. Another elder serves by conducting ceremonial procedures such as baptism, wedding ceremony, and funeral. Of course there also is an elder in charge of education, especially the Sunday school and bible studies. The last one specially deals with music and instruments.”<sup>10</sup>

Zheng<sup>11</sup>: “The church I am attending has about 270 families, on Sunday evening 700 people gather in the church participate in the service; 300 Adults, 100 children in Sunday school, 200 migrant workers and 50 other children with migrant worker parents, and disabled people with hearing or/and speech impairments. We

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<sup>9</sup> Wnag is an ex-elder of a house church in Yueqing, Wenzhou.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Zheng is a young male church leader born in 1973 and as well as a CEO of a LED company. He is in charge of the church he is attending.

have quite a lot of people who run their own business where trade and commerce are their main field of work. Others include those who run restaurant business, garment industries and electronics. Among them, without any concrete research, I would guess 30% are doing their own business in producing goods, 50% are in trade. We call those who are in manufacturing business as entrepreneurs. In our church, we have 20 entrepreneurs producing switches, meters, electronic devices, stamping part products, and shell molding machines etc.”<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, especially during those meetings of organizations, the members explicitly give priority to big entrepreneurs. The wealthiest Christian entrepreneurs are among those receiving the most attention at the meeting. They are recognized not for service to the church but mainly for combining personal faith and business achievements.

### *Secular or Sincere?*

For the same reason, Wenzhou’s distinctive characteristic also appears in the perception of Christianity in relation to economy. For many rural believers, Christian identity tends to draw a sharp distinction between the worldly and the spiritual (Cao 2007, 2010; Leung 1999). Being a Christian requires taking a spiritual approach to all worldly issues including wealth. The people in rural churches do not expect a successful businessman to be able to preach a sermon or see the capacity in private business as vital to an evangelical

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014.

preacher's mission. However, as mentioned above, in Wenzhou churches, those successful entrepreneurs take charges of all church duties from giving a sermon to conducting ceremonies. Additionally, "unlike marginalizing rural churchgoers who favor the conservative idea of withdrawing from the world, Wenzhou Christian entrepreneurs publicly acknowledge having been blessed by both God and the state in their business success" (Cao 2010:24). From the Wenzhou churches perspective, the economic progress and success of members in Wenzhou churches is a great "blessing" from God. One of the church member Zhou<sup>13</sup> said, "God has given us this company and let us make money to help others." Another interviewee, Lin, an entrepreneur also described the economic growth as a blessing from God by saying that

"I have believed in God for 34 years. I am thankful that God has blessed my business over the years. I strongly believe that this does not belong to me, but to God and his Kingdom. Today, the purpose and ways of God's calling for a mission vary, thus, it is senseless to consider doing business as following money not Jesus. Instead, what I believe is that it is more important to understand our work as God's mission and glorify him by doing right in our work place in our daily life. So, I try to work hard with honesty and treat my employees fairly."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Zhou is a male house church member in his 60s. He also owns a company producing electronic parts.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014. Lin is a male Christian in a house church who owns a manufacturing company in Luian, Wenzhou which produces electronic devices.

Furthermore, the church where I conducted the research was having a meeting with a group of small and medium sized entrepreneurs and business people. The purpose of holding these evening meetings are to learn and implement biblical approaches to making money. They regularly meet once every two weeks to share and learn the strategies and proper ways to run their business as Christians. A bible teacher from Xiamen came to teach the concept of business ethics and the actual management skills in the bible. He even teaches biblical standards for recruitment. To Wenzhou Christians, business is a significant channel which can open many doors to those who have never heard the Gospel and the Christians entrepreneurs make the most of the opportunities to build on their close relationships with employees and business contacts (Christian Today 2014).

## **2.2 Politics and religion: Church-state relations**

### ***TSPM VS. House Churches***

During the Cultural Revolution, the repression of religion was practiced severely, dominating the structure of religious expression and suppressing religious thought and ritual. For that reason, the relationship between the house churches and the state has often been described in oppositional terms. To consolidate its power over this sector, the Chinese Communist regime uses institutional mechanisms. The CCP(Chinese Communist Party) established

“ the United Front Department of the CCP; the SARA (State Administration for Religious Affairs) of the State Council; the Police Department; the National Security Department; anti-terrorist task forces; and the two state-sponsored peak Christian associations: the National Committee of the TSPM of Protestant Churches and the CCC(China Christian Council) (Kuo 2011: 1044).

As Yang argues, “the black market---a black market comprises all illegal (officially banned) religious organizations, believers, and religious activities--- is a logical consequence of heavy regulation. Inasmuch as authorities restrict religion by sanctioning certain religious groups and activities, a regulation simultaneously makes other religious groups illegal (Yang 2006: 98). Thus, the CCP’s tight regulation and institutionalization of religion created a division between churches: the legal TSPM churches and illegal house churches.

“House churches are variously described as autonomous, independent, unofficial and underground; however, their shared characteristic is that they are unregistered religious groups which, for differing reasons, are independent of the state and the officially sanctioned Protestant churches linked to the Christian Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC)” (Koesel 2013: 574).

Since defined as illegal elements, house churches hold their meetings secretly in private with no protection or support from the state. Consequently, house churches face a number of challenges and limitations.

First, most obviously, due to the state's concern on the house churches' possible threat against the regime, they are viewed with suspicion from both the state and official religious communities. And also, house churches in general face difficulties in growing the church because locations of services change frequently and members are cautious about inviting. They also have financial difficulties since there is no governmental subsidies. (Koesel 2013).

However, this is not the case in Wenzhou. Hundreds of sumptuous unofficial house churches decorate the church with conspicuous red crosses, operate openly in suburban Wenzhou (Cao 2010: 17). Aikman also delineated that he was surprised by the profusion of highly visible "house church" buildings throughout Wenzhou, and they were gigantic, ornate structures with huge red crosses (Aikman 2003: 187). One article describes that "though sometimes called 'underground churches' such groups in Wenzhou often operate openly, with hundreds of people gathering in buildings clearly identifiable as Christian churches" (Chu 2000). During the fieldwork, many house churches, including the church I visited having their own Christian buildings were commonly observable. From the experience in Shanghai for 6 years and researches in other areas such as Neimenggu and Xinjiang, it is absolutely impossible for house churches build their own church buildings. Needless to say, having crosses outside buildings cannot even be on the list of consideration. Underground house churches in the city try hard to keep a low profile; limiting the gathering size, avoiding strangers, and singing and speaking in reduced voices during gathering (Yang 2005: 430).



Having gigantic physical buildings is only a fragmentary evidence, but it is enough to assume that aforementioned challenges which most house churches in china faces are not the concerns of Wenzhou house churches. Then, these evidences and phenomena naturally lead to the questions that how is it possible for Wenzhou Churches to have such openness? How can illegal organizations enjoy such liberalized social space within a hostile and closely monitored environment?

### ***Church-Government Relations: Repression and Resistance***

Based on observations and understandings of the history of political repression of religion during the Cultural Revolution, many scholars of Chinese Christianity viewed the relationship between the state and the church through the frame of political context- repression and resistance (Spiegel 2004; Kindopp 2004; Yang 2000, 2004; Leung 2007). Over the years, also for Wenzhou Christianity there have existed government suppression of religion in harsh ways. Recently, what has drawn the attentions of western media is the demolition of church buildings and destruction of crosses. In 2014, the Economist reported that more than 230 have been classed as “illegal structures” and removed and other journals also wrote that “[s]ince March, at least a dozen other churches across Zhejiang Province have been told to remove their crosses or have received demolition orders, a significant escalation in a party campaign to counter the influence of China’s fastest-growing religion” (Johnson 2014). Among them one of the largest churches

called Sanjiang church was completely demolished. Outside media sources described the event as a repression by using words like “a national battle,” “persecution,” or “vandalism” and reported church goers protesting as resistance (Li 2014; the Economist 2014; the NY times 2014).

A scholar sharing same perceptions on the church and state relations in China with previous western media, Kindopp delineated that “a group of theologically liberal Protestants supported the Chinese Communist Party’s rise to power and assisted the party-state in creating the TSPM. On the other end of the spectrum, outspoken theological conservatives and leaders of indigenous Protestant movements opposed cooperation with the communist regime or its representative organs” (Kindopp 2004: 122). Simply, the TSPM churches support the CCP and house church members are against it. Naturally, house churches in other regions have received intense suppression from both central and local governments. However, what clearly presents the Wenzhou house churches distinctiveness is that “the Sanjiang ...church was officially sanctioned, and not considered one of the independent, underground churches that often run afoul of the government” (Johnson 2014). Additionally, according to an interviewee, there are more TSPM churches which were forced to tear down the crosses during this government- planned incident. Nevertheless, suffice it to say that it did not actually target the unofficial house churches which supposed to be the first to be regulated and discriminated from the state’s point of view.

On the other hand, it has been observed to see forms of resistance

appear in house churches. During my visit to Wenzhou, I attended a Sunday school service for high school students in an unofficial house church. One of the elders was teaching the history of Chinese Protestantism, especially the division between TSPM Churches and house churches. The elder described the TSPM church as unlawful and unjust organization which put the CCP's regulation in prior to the teachings of God. He added we should be ruled by the law of God not the law of the CCP. Astonishingly, a female teenager even said out loudly, "I hate Xi Jinping!"<sup>15</sup> In other parts of China, this kind of activities can be understood as seditious and emblematic form of resistance which potentially can agitate the social stability.

### ***Church-Government Relations: Mutual Accommodation***

The church-state relationship has a negotiated nature that ranges from outright opposition to qualified mutual accommodation. The relationship between the local government and the Wenzhou house church is much closer to the latter one. Although, in Wenzhou, the forms of both oppression and resistance on Christian churches exist, the fundamental context is different from other areas because the local government and the house church are not directly against each other. For example, in Sanjiang's case, "people were not blaming the Wenzhou authorities. They believe that the orders came from Xia Baolong, the Communist party chief and former governor of Zhejiang

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 12 Aug. 2014. Female, age 17, she is a daughter of a house church elder.

province. "It comes from much higher up, Wenzhou is just a testing ground for a widespread offensive against Christian influence, said one pastor, citing internal sources. Xia was Xi Jinping's deputy from 2003 to 2007, before the latter became the country's president" (the Guardian 2014).

For the Wenzhou local government, unlike Chinese Christianity in rural areas, Wenzhou Christianity serves more as a symbol of Western modernity than as a symbol of salvation or a medium of resistance (Counstable 1994; Diamond 1996; Kipinis 2002). The local officials see advantages in Christianity's growth in mainly two reasons: the economic benefit and social stability.

"Although the state politically appropriates and promotes the Wenzhou model as an integral part of its development project (Shi et al. 2002), regional development contributes to depoliticizing the local religious context and reshaping church-state relations" (Cao 2010: 34). Capital commercialism is an effective way to secure and consolidate individual believer's faith identity. "When asked to comment on the relationship between economic development and Christian faith in Wenzhou, the boss Christians frequently refer to the correlation between the number of churches and economic advancement in Europe and the United States as an obvious answer. Like other non- Christian entrepreneurs, many Christian entrepreneurs have earned much recognition and respect for their rising economic power from the reformist state and the local populace" (Cao 2010:34). This contributes to their growing confidence and assertiveness in dealing with local government

authorities on religious issues.

In addition, they do realize that without the proper protection of local government, it would be impossible either to be successful in their business or to enjoy the relatively liberalized social space, their religion. The following leader's comment on a website of a Christian company well describes the accommodational relationship between the local government and the church. It says, "the illustrious success of H [company could not have been] made without national, province, and city leaders and international colleagues care and support," with a picture of the CEO of the company and the secretary of Zhejiang province sitting together.<sup>16</sup>

Christians are also becoming more socially and politically engaged. Through their social engagements such as charitable work and rising confidence in negotiating with the government, Christians exert a strong presence in Chinese society that belies their relatively small numerical size (Lim 2013: 6). As stated in the article,

"...local leaders lend support, or turn blind eye, because they find that Christians are good citizens. Their commitment to community welfare helps to reinforce precious stability....In recent years the party's concerns have shifted from people's beliefs to the maintenance of stability and the party's monopoly of power. If working with churches helps achieve these aims, it will do so, even though it still

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<sup>16</sup> To protect the interviewee's privacy, the address of the website is intentionally neglected.

frets about encouraging an alternative source of authority... increasingly, the party needs the help of religious believers. It is struggling to supply social services. Wenzhou government also encourages entrepreneurs to set up charities” (the Economist 2014: 25).

According to *China daily*, Wenzhou government has continuously issued policies to encourage local capital to flow into charity work. Even though the measure maybe in conflict with a national regulation,<sup>17</sup> the Wenzhou government implemented a policy to attract more private capital to build schools for residents’ children, allowing them to earn a profit. Besides building schools, other charity work such as building nursing homes is also invigorated. The city recognized the privately run nonenterprise unit as a long-term charity work which could ensure the social stability. In the same context, whether with or without intentions, Wenzhou churches actively participate in charity work, giving a concrete support to the local government’s policy. For example, one of the ultraconservative groups, the Little Flocks “sent hundreds of volunteers and millions of renminbi [(人民币)] to help with the rescue and reconstruction efforts”(Wang 2013 : 14). In addition, a leader from a house church proudly introduced the charity under his church:

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<sup>17</sup> According to the regulation released by the central government in 1998, privately run nonenterprise units are nongovernmental organizations registered under related civil administration departments in China while their assets don’t belong to any department or individual. (Yu, Ran, “Wenzhou wants businesses to look to charity,” *China Daily*. 8 Oct. 2013. Web. (Accessed 11 Jan. 2015).

“Our charity started from a scratch. In the beginning, we only had about ten brothers and only focused on helping the poor in our neighborhood. After 3 years, we enlarged our scope to help underprivileged people like students with poor families and seniors who need economic and social support. For example, this charity gave scholarships to a few students and created welfare program like providing food, basic commodities, and building shelters and nursing homes. Additionally, we also support the disabled, especially those who have either hearing loss or muteness.”<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Wenzhou Christians are even politically engaged in a very direct way. During the interview, an ex-house church elder said there exists government officials and the members of the Party in Wenzhou houses churches. Even one Chinese article in 2004 claimed that three to four million party members had become Christians (the Economist 2014: 26). According to the ex-elder,

“There are government officials (dangzhenggongwuyuan 黨政公務員) attending in this church with small percentages. They are not as enthusiastic and passionate as other Christians, but they became Christians due to their Christian family background. Many of them occasionally attend the Sunday worship service and feel embarrassed to openly express their belief.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 17 Aug. 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 12 Aug. 2014.

The number may not be officially recorded, however, considering the seditious and emblematic character of unofficial house churches, the meaning of the existence of government officials in such places alone has its own significance.

## **2.3 Going Global**

### ***Wenzhounese Diaspora***

Although Wenzhou's urbanization and industrialization began just three decades ago, it has been a transnational society actively engaged in trade and commerce for many centuries. Some half a million people of Wenzhou origin currently reside in over 100 countries and regions, mainly in Europe and the US (Cao 2008 : 81). According to official figures, the total of overseas Chinese from Wenzhou has reached to 425,000 by 2004, accounting for 5.7% of total population registered as Wenzhounese (Wu and Zanin 2007 : 5) and in 2012, the number of overseas Wenzhounese in 131 countries reached to 600,000 (Caixin 2012). The large expatriate community of Wenzhou people around the world maintains close social, economic and cultural ties with their hometown (Cao 2011; Cao 2008).

Economically, as the rapid development and global impact of Chinese economy cannot be separated from the contributions of its over 30 million overseas Chinese. Wenzhou also shows us the links between international migration ethnic economies in the receiving countries and local



development in the sending communities (Wu and Zanin 2007:1).

As Wenzhounese entrepreneurs have become a player in the global markets, their influence has reached out overseas. Wenzhounese have been treated as an important resources for Wenzhou's development (Wu and Zanin 2007). Wenzhounese merchants expanded sales networks all over China and abroad through Wenzhounese migration networks. Wenzhounese migrants develop transnational business networks that exploit the drive of privately owned businesses in Zhejiang Province to increase exports (Zhang and Wang 2004). These transnational networks have enabled Wenzhou to look outwards and stay on the forefront of China's capitalist development.

On top of that, overseas Chinese have served as not only a crucial source of startup capital for ventures back home, but also a valuable connection and resource for relatives and friends seeking to follow in their footsteps (Cao 2008). Chen also argued that "one cannot explain the success of Qingtian, [a county in southeastern Zhejiang Province] and Wenzhou natives abroad without accounting for the extensive and tight-knit family and social networks to which they belong. To be sure, natives of other regions like Guangdong and Fujian can also boast of broad, supportive networks; however, Qingtianese and Wenzhounese networks are well-known for their ability to amass and share capital, resources, know-how, and even labor on a scale and for a longer duration that few others can match and none can exceed" (Chen 2011: 9).

Consequently, the unique characteristics of tight family connection

and the close linkage between the overseas wenzhounese and their hometown are also reflected in the religious arena. As Kindopp addressed high rates of conversion to Christianity among Chinese abroad have given rise to transnational networks of Chinese Christians, which have become a major force in mission work. There are now some fifteen hundred Chinese Protestant churches in North America and several hundred in Europe, many of which support some form of mission activity in China (Kindopp 2004: 138-139). Among them, many of the Chinese churches in Europe, especially in France, Spain and Italy, have been set up largely by Wenzhou believers and they are also active in Russia and Eastern Europe (Lambert 2006). Overseas congregations form sister churches with mainland churches, supplying funding and materials and offering prayers of support (Kindopp 2004: 138-139). Those immigrant Wenzhou churches regularly invite Wenzhou preachers to preach there in Wenzhou dialect and pay their travel expenses. Likewise, outside support has more visibly influenced the development of China's large house-church networks (Attanasi and Yong 2012: 156).

### ***Overseas Christians***

Wenzhou's house churches are also supported and influenced by many non-Chinese Christians abroad, and at the same time try to maintain close relationship with overseas Christians and their churches and organizations. Mostly, Churches in North America, Europe, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South

Korea, and Southeast Asia are engaged in sustaining the relationship and they “tend to be wary of China’s official church and focus their efforts on direct evangelism and supporting the house-church movement” (Kindopp 2004: 137-138).

Those overseas Christians and Christian organizations visit churches in Wenzhou and try to sustain close relationship by bringing relatively advanced Christian culture and its products. Wenzhou Christians have imported Bibles and other Christian materials for leadership and evangelism training. Besides the materials and training, Wenzhou churches also have received strategic advice or guidance from a great number of overseas Christians and their organizations. Today there are overseas Christians who come to preach and teach, especially pastors trained in the US or Taiwan frequently visit those house churches (Cao 2010; Kindopp 2004).

As Cao delineated, Foreign Christian bands and musicians also performed regularly, producing a “Christian fever” among the local youth. Christians from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, the US, Canada, Australia and Holland are invited by the local Wenzhou churches and their presence draws large crowd (Cao 2010). During my research, I participated as a member of a Christian band from one of the biggest churches in South Korea. A Wenzhou house church regularly invite this Church band to have worship conference which were composed of Modern Christian music and dramas. Youth from many other local houses churches came and passionately engaged in every activities. There were over 3000 people including the

Christian communities and other local non-believers. For having too many people and not enough capacity, some had to stand up for the whole time. Exactly as Cao (2010) mentioned, the band members received applause and fervent reactions when they ended their speeches or performances. Some enthusiastic local young believers took photos of band members, and asked them for email addresses or ways to contact. While the Korean band was having worship services, other organization from the US opened a camp for teenagers. According to a young participant in the camp, the church invite Overseas Christian groups regularly for such activities; one from Taiwan the year before, and this year from the US.<sup>20</sup>

With its historical base of receiving the Gospel from foreign missionaries in the beginning, this connection with foreign churches and organizations seems very reasonable, however, the reason for less regulations of the local government on this matter comes from much practical reasons. “There is...an enormous amount of communication between Christians around the world and counterparts in China, and at the same time significant amounts of money and other resources flow into China from the outside” (Madsen 2010: 253). As Madsen describes, “Chinese Christians...import[ed] not only ideas, but methods of organization from abroad, not to mention the money that helps in the construction of church buildings, provisions of bibles and other educational material, and support from religious personnel”

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, Wenzhou, 8 Aug. 2014.

(Madsen 2010: 255). Representing the highest form of Christian modernity, these overseas Christians have become a significant source from which the local Christian community constantly draws inspiration and legitimacy (Cao 2010: 90).

### ***Learning and Copying Strategy***

Historically, especially in the early years of post-Mao reform, due to its geographic and linguistic limits, imitation was the starting point for many Wenzhou village entrepreneurs in low-end family-owned manufacturing enterprises (Cao 2010: 93). This strategy became one of the core factors which led small and medium scale enterprises in Wenzhou to achieve such dramatic industrial growth. Subsequently, their skill of imitating is widely known and also studied. During my research in Dahongmen Market<sup>21</sup> in Beijing, many taxi drivers praised the imitation skills of Wenzhou merchants. One of them said, “The Wenzhounese are really good at imitating, if you give them the dress that you are wearing now, they can make exactly the same

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<sup>21</sup> the Dahongmen-Nanyuan area in the Fengtai district of southern Beijing was nothing more than a derelict farming community. With the influx of rural migrants following the economic reforms in the early 1980s, however, the area burgeoned into a vast illegal migrant settlement. The area was commonly referred to as Zhejiangcun (浙江村 Zhejiang village) in reference to the large number of migrants in the area who originated from rural Wenzhou in Zhejiang province. (Jeong, Jong-Ho, “Transplanted Wenzhou Model and Transnational Ethnic Economy: experiences of Zhejiangcun's Wenzhou migrants and Wangjing's Chaoxianzu (ethnic Korean Chinese) migrants in Beijing.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(86)).

one on the next day, and within a week, you will see the same dress in every Wenzhounese garment store.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the ability to imitate has been viewed as a defining feature of the “Wenzhou ethos” (wenzhouren jingshen 温州人精神) and also championed publicly in the nationwide fever for “Wenzhou study” (Cao 2010: 93).

Furthermore, later on, when consumers in China became increasingly fastidious and started to complain about the quality of Wenzhou’s products which became synonymous with inferiority, they also used the same strategy Wenzhou enterprises studied and copied skills from more advanced technologies from companies abroad to overcome the bad reputation and succeeded (Sonobe et al. 2004:543).

Due to this experience, the method of copying is also implemented in Wenzhou’s Christianity. From those invited overseas churches, Wenzhou house churches adopt skills, resources, and information that are perceived as modernized Christian culture such as playing musical instruments (mostly electronic), institutionalizing church management, and participating mission work. For example, when I conducted the research both in 2013 and 2014, the church which opened the conference asked the Korean church to teach its own church bands to improve their skills in playing instruments. The church leaders enthusiastically supported and acclaimed how the Korean churches are skillful and professionally specialized in music, and passionately

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, Beijing, 2 Aug. 2013.

expressed their desire to learn the skills. To suffice their demand, the invited Korean church band actually was organized by professional musicians and gave lectures and lessons to Wenzhou house church members.

According to Cao, “the élite circle of entrepreneurial leaders is most enthusiastic about overseas Christian models in the local church, given their extensive cosmopolitan experiences. [However,] ambitious Wenzhou Christian leaders see learning and copying from overseas Christians not as their ultimate goal, but as an essential means for elevating the status of the Wenzhou church in global Christian development...” (Cao 2010:91; Cao 2008:85). Wenzhou church leaders strongly believe that their given economic prosperity their international connection, the nature of migration, and Wenzhou’s concrete Christian background and history can be understood as God’s plan for their mission as global evangelists. In the same context, previous evidences already show that Wenzhouese travel all over the world and Christians from this region spread the gospel and set up their own worship communities wherever they go.

The song repeatedly sung by Wenzhou Christians called “Mission China (xuanjiaode zhongguo 宣教的中國)” well represents the passion and comprehension of their role of Chinese Christians and their strong eagerness and desire to bring gospel within the nation and to the world. The following is the chorus :

With the mission, I march

To wake up China in a deep sleep  
I will never turn back  
With the vision, I march  
To see the mission China  
Spreading the gospel every corner of the world <sup>23</sup>.

With this mission driven globalization, Wenzhou house church leaders use copying and learning strategies not only to import the advanced Christian culture, but to export Wenzhou Christianity. Via the enhancement resulted by the imitation method, the Church “anticipate the rise of Wenzhou church model that would be comparable to the status of the Wenzhou economic model and also be widely studied and copied by others” (Cao 2011: 91).

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<sup>23</sup> “Mission China.” <http://www.jidujiao.com/yinyue/3907/> (Accessed Jan.3.2015)



## V. Conclusion

During the Maoist era, Christianity in China was considered as a tool for Western imperialism, thus, Christianity was regulated and suppressed under the CCP's governmental strategy and control. But since the economic reform, Christianity has experienced rapid growth and development with changes. Wenzhou, known as the city of economic development, gained fame as "China's Jerusalem" with numerous Christian communities, particularly house churches with comparatively liberalized space. Thus, the purpose of this article has been to explain this unusual phenomena by examining the relationship between the house churches and the local economy, politics and its overseas network.

To study the connection between the Wenzhou house churches and the local economy, the author focuses on the role of the entrepreneur which is an overlapping intersection that encompasses both arenas. And also, through understanding the general perception of Wenzhou house church members towards "doing business" and "making money", the author differentiate Wenzhou Christianity from that of other areas.

Moreover, through the frame of church-state relations, this paper argues that unlike other areas, Wenzhou's unregistered house churches enjoy much liberalized social space by integrating their economic power and social participation with the local government's politics. In doing so, even though the churches may face sporadic state persecution for their unlawful status,

however, the local government rather sees house churches more beneficial to the local economy and social stability.

Finally, this study discovers that with its distinctiveness in mobility, Wenzhou house churches have large overseas connections with overseas Wenzhounese and Christian communities from different nations. Wenzhou churches pursue their development by applying the imitation strategy. In consequence, the network with overseas not only nurtures the development in Christianity, but also the local economy and this became a core factor which Wenzhou house churches obtain their legitimacy.

Via overall analysis, two implications can be drawn from this study: One is the experience of Wenzhou's economic development is deeply embedded in the religious space ; and Wenzhou Christians proudly utilize their economic power and Wenzhounese network--- both national and international--- as an effective tool for establishing and maintaining their concrete positions in the society. In hence, Wenzhou Christianity successfully transformed its identity from the legacy of Western imperialism to modernity.

From the Church-State relations' perspective, the local government also avail itself of the house churches' attempt to integrate their religion into mainstream political economic developments. As long as these illegal elements do not directly confront the regime and maintain the social stability, to local government, the Wenzhou house churches is not an enemy to defeat, but rather a strategic partner

With its distinctiveness, the implications of Wenzhou house church's scope of possible influence remain uncertain. Throughout the nation, current trends certainly show that the illegal house churches continue to expand and consolidate their footings in the atheist China. But, house churches in other regions and their activities are still restricted severely, whether the government would establish a reasonable *modus vivendi* with this illicit element is also elusive.

However, there is a possibility that as Wenzhou Study and the Wenzhou model of economic development serves as a microcosm of China's rural industrialization and modernization, in other localities especially in coastal areas, the Wenzhou Christianity would have nationwide future influence and implication. Wenzhou cultural identity emphasizes migration and sojourning, thus, wherever they travel and sojourn, people of Wenzhou origin build their ethnic enclave in the form of Wenzhou's uniqueness. The Wenzhou model of church development is in the same context. Building churches is an important element of the local bosses' cultural strategies to distinguish themselves in a particular socio-symbolic world. Wenzhou Christianity expresses its intense religious energy and expands its influence through massive appropriation of sacred space (Yang 2004). Of course this needs further research and studies, but it is undeniable that Wenzhou Christianity has its potential influence in the arena of religion and Christianity in contemporary China.

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## 국문초록

개혁개방기 이후 중국은 괄목할만한 경제 성장을 이루면서 세계 제2의 경제 강국으로 자리매김 하였다. 사회주의 중국이 의도적으로 경제에만 국한된 개방을 추구하였음에도 불구하고 시장의 자율화는 다른 부문의 개방과 더불어 다양한 사회 분야에서 국가의 통제를 완화시켰다. 그 중 가장 이목을 끄는 것은 개신교의 성장, 특별히 지하가정교회의 발전이다. 특히 오늘날 중국이 겪고 있는 경제성장과 기독교의 발전, 공식 삼자교회와 가정교회간의 분리 등의 현상들이 집약적으로 나타나는 지역이 바로 온주이다. 절강성에 위치한 온주시는 개혁개방에 의해 야기된 기독교의 성장 및 경제발전뿐 아니라 비공식 가정교회가 대형의 물리적 교회 건물을 소유하고, 공식적으로 신앙을 드러내는 등의 예외적 특수성이 나타난다. 온주에서 나타나는 이러한 현상들은 가정교회가 소위 말하는 “지하”교회라기보다 “지상”교회임을 증명하고 있다. 따라서 본고는 온주의 종교와 각각 경제, 정치, 세계화의 연계라는 시각에서 온주 가정교회의 특징들을 살펴보고자 한다.

첫째, 온주 가정교회와 지역경제의 관계는 이 두 부문의 교집합인 기업인의 역할에서 잘 드러난다. 온주 기독교의 지도자들은 성공한 기업인으로 엘리트 집단에 속해 있으며, 교회 내부와 사회에서 지위를 확고히 하고 있다. 온주의 가정교회는 온주 지역의 경제발전과 지도자층을 이루고 있는 기독교 기업인들로 인해 물질과 그것을 소유 및 획득하는 행위에 대한 이해와 인식이 진보적이라는 것에서 다른 지역의 가정교회로부터 차별화 된다.

또한, 교회-국가 관계라는 틀 안에서 온주의 비공식 가정교회는 경제력과 사회적 참여라는 수단을 통하여 지방정부와 협력하고, 이를 매개로 여타 지역의 가정교회보다 완화된 사회적 공간을 향유할 수 있다. 온주의 가정교회가 여전히 비합법적인 지위에 있으며 가정교회에 대한 산발적인 정부의 제제가 존재하나, 온주 지방정부는 오히려 가정교회의 지역경제와 사회 안정 측면의 순기능에 주목한다는 특징이 있다.

마지막으로 온주 가정교회가 추구하는 세계화를 가능하게 하는 중요한 요소이자 특징으로 온주인의 유동성을 꼽을 수 있다. 온주교회는 각국에 흩어져 있는 온주인 디아스포라 및 세계 교회와의 연계를 유지하고 있으며, 선진 기독교 문화를 모방함으로써 스스로의 발전을 도모한다. 해외 기독교 공동체와의 유대관계는 온주 기독교의 발전뿐 아니라 지방경제를 활성화시키는 요인이며 온주 교회가 정당성을 확보하는 중요한 수단이다.

따라서 온주 가정교회에서 나타나는 일련의 특징들은 온주의 경제발전과 지방정부와 가정교회의 상호 전략적인 타협과 순응에서 비롯되었음을 알 수 있다. 향후 온주 가정교회의 전략과 방법으로 다른 지역의 가정교회 또한 동일한 지위를 확보 할 수 있는가는 명확히 판단하기 어려우나, 온주교회가 온주 경제 모델과 온주인의 유동성을 통해 중국의 기독교 발전에 기여하는 바가 있을 것으로 본다.

**주요어:** 중국, 개신교, 온주, 가정교회, 온주경제, 지방 정부-종교 관계

**학 번:** 2013-22072